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The Duties of our Laymen.

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DUTIES OF OUR LAYMEN.

“Occupy till I come,” was a commission given especially to certain *male* servants. Responsibility is indeed confined to no sex. Yet there are reasons why the highest duties and the largest behests should be laid on men. To them belong health, will, courage, energy, activity, wealth, enterprize, intellect, opportunities,—nay the multiplicity of talents—beyond those that pertain, in general, to the other sex. That Christian women use their talents more wisely, and liberally, and usefully than men, is the more to their credit, and to the reproach of the male membership. It was said only of a woman, “She hath done what she could.” And, looking over all our communions, who does not see that they not only outnumber but outstrip, in all the religious employments appropriate to their sphere, the activities of the other sex? Yet all this does not invalidate the position that the superior responsibilities and advantages for usefulness in the Christian life are with the laymen.

To arouse and direct and sanctify these powers in behalf of the spread of Christ’s kingdom, would be a mission worthy of the highest genius and noblest intellect. Would that some great mind, of apostolic fervor and unwearied energy, could go abroad through our churches, and in behalf of this specialty, give an impulse, such as we have sometimes seen in some great reform—as when Edwards plead for Sabbath keeping; or Cornelius for ministerial education; or Beecher for temperance—an impulse that would quicken into newness of life the

masses of inert, impassive lay membership, that lie like a dead weight everywhere through Christendom.

There has been for many ages of Christian history, among laymen, a disposition, almost equivalent to a wilful purpose, to depute nearly all religious knowledge, and activity, and influence to the ministry; making them the almost exclusive proxies of the Church. The grand battle pieces, in the Trojan wars, so thrillingly wrought out by the old blind bard, exhibit chiefly great warriors contending for the mastery; while the rank and file of the forces, the masses of military, all lie ignobly in the shadows of the picture; as if the tides of war all turned on the exploits of leaders. So we seem to have set up our clerical heroes, and expect them to do all the fighting of the Church militant.

We might adduce from the history of the Church abundant proof, that in all its seasons of prosperity, whether in particular or in general revivals of religion, the services of the lay membership have been largely required and freely given. From the days when the brethren who, "scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the word," down to the successes of the Gospel in our own country and in Great Britain, yet fresh and fragrant in our memories, the Christian brotherhood have been zealous and efficient workers. Could the lay energies which were brought into exercise two years ago, be sustained, and still further quickened, and be diffused all over Christendom, how would the aridity and unsightliness and barrenness of our Churches be changed into verdure, and beauty, and fertility!

Does not the parable of the sower, in the *relation of the soil to the seed*, elucidate a fact apt to be overlooked? It is this, that the responsibility for the failure of the truth to exert a saving power, lies, to a large extent, *with the pews*, rather than the pulpit. The parable intimates, what is observation and experience, that most of the seed is fruitless; and the censures, direct or implied, that lie along its statements, do not fall on the sower. And this suggests the question whether we do not habitually hold the pulpit to too much responsibility for the want of success in preaching; thus unduly exonerating those who sit under its ministry from their delinquency in the premises? And how indeed shall the stones that encumber the soil be gathered

away—how shall the thorns be extirpated, and the whole ground be put in condition for certain and profitable culture, but by the diligent and wise pains-taking of the Master's laborers? And how too shall the vacant places of the gospel feast, ready with all its abundance, and fitness, and pleasantness of food, be filled, if His servants go not forth and persuade and constrain the reluctant and unwilling and resisting needy ones into the guest chamber; and in all the courtesies and attentions and services of the feast, see that they are provided with place and plenty?

Now, as indolence is not a virtue in common business, and the shirking of toils out of our own hands into those of others, is not generous in any department of secular life, much less are they so in the responsibilities and labors that belong to religion. And as there is no warrant in conscience, or common sense, or manliness for the state of things complained of, so there is none in Scripture, that highest and supremest dictum of duty. While there are minute and specific directions, luminous and unmistakable, to guide the evangelist and pastor—the “doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness,” that every where adorn the word of God, are simply that the lay mind, universal, of the Church, might be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The Church, the *Church*—not the ministry apart from the Church, in any sense—is spoken of as “the salt of the earth;” “the light of the world;” “the pillar and ground of the truth;” as “good soldiers of Jesus Christ;” “obedient children;” as those that “strive for the mastery;” “runners in the race set before us;” “good and faithful servants;” “branches that bring forth much fruit.” Scripture seems to have almost exhausted the vocabulary of injunction and illustration in regard to the responsibilities of the Christian brotherhood. Blessed indeed are “those servants, whom when the Lord cometh he shall find so doing;” while doubly condemned will he be, who wearing Christ's livery, in indolent enjoyment, will say, “My Lord delayeth his coming;” but who “shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.”

True piety is a working principle. Its idea is expressed in the parable of the leaven. Active, deliberate, constant, un-

wearied, pervasive, increasing—always approximating the complete. Or like the growth of the body—development in every direction, outward as well as inward, even to the “measure of the stature of the fulness of the perfect man in Christ Jesus.” Nor should it be a few of the lay brethren doing this work. All the diversified talent of the body of Christians should be invoked. Some have wisdom in counsel; some have restless activity; some have power in their presence; some have gifts of speech; some have influence by an ever fresh friendliness of spirit; some have a tact almost as marvellous as instinct; some have in their earnestness a passport to usefulness; some have a natural authority, to which other minds yield themselves; some win by the magnetism of love; and all may attract, as does even the loadstone, in its quiet *vis inertia*, by “a life hid with Christ in God.” But as in military movements, it will not do to have men, who, in a panic, disorganized, may be scattered by the mere spectre of fear; so the Church militant must have such discipline and tactics, such appointments and employments, that its soldiery, in all its grades, shall be doing the right work, at the right time, and in the right place. “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do,” written on the palm of every man’s right hand! And all indolence and selfishness perpetually rebuked and kept at bay, by this word, “The Son of man came not to be *ministered unto*, but to *minister*.”

We proceed to discuss some points of lay duty, without being able to take up all that deserve our attention; and these only relative ones. The wide field of private and personal obligations we do not now propose to touch.

1. “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.” Whether this is a historical sketch by the prophet, describing some marvellous episode in the past of the Jewish Church; or an abrupt prophecy of an almost millennial condition of the incoming dispensation, does not certainly appear. Yet it affords us a topic of duty, rich in its aspects of beauty, and full of delightful Christian fruitage. We mean *the social Christian life*. An utterly unsocial Christianity would be a solecism—as much related to a true brotherhood as a sandy desert would be to “a field which the Lord hath blessed.”

There is, of course, more or less of the exercise of the social principle in the Church; yet vastly less than is requisite. If we consider a supposed wise exercise of this duty in any given Church, how beautiful in its aspects, and how refreshing and wholesome in its results, would it appear! The refined ministering of their suavity unobtrusively to the uncultivated; the opulent "condescending to men of low estate;" the educated making the proper social contact with the uneducated; the spiritually-minded imparting their tone to those lying near the dubious border-line between the world and the Church—the superior everywhere levelling up the inferior; the weak strengthened; the wandering reclaimed; the uninformed taught; the timid encouraged; the worldly-minded spiritualized; the Church made more homogeneous—"the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part."

And not alone the exercise of the social principle on the Church, but also on the *impenitent world*. It is here that the delinquency of church members is most palpable. Among themselves there is professional character enough to give some savor of social Christian life. Necessity, habit, and choice, all conspire to some Christian intercourse; but, outside of this, our male membership is, in many cases, little better than negative quantities in algebra; which, to the unmathematical eye, look like numbers; while the more there is of them, the less is the sum total. It is here, most signally and disastrously, for the spread of religion, that Christian activity is transferred by our male constituency to the ministry; a proxy system which met, often and faithfully, to some extent, cannot be fulfilled—thus leaving a large measure of personal effort unaccomplished. The reserve of Christian men, in regard to religious matters, towards the irreligious, impresses the latter unfavorably both towards religion and the character of professors. Every other thing, in which men take an interest, *they talk about*; but this is ignored. If the heart be fully sensible of the value of piety to itself; if it have any appreciation of its value to others; if it have any generous promptings towards the spiritual well being of others; if it have any sense of their danger without it—then out of the abundance of such a heart the tongue will speak.

In a sense, every man of God should be an evangelist. The impenitent, who are accustomed to hear the truth in our sanctuaries, will be likely to receive, with profit, its reiteration from the lips of friendship. And to that large number, everywhere, who live within the sound of the church-going bell, but who rarely cross church thresholds, how useful would be the discreet, faithful, and loving voice of Christian warning, invitation, entreaty, and instruction! Coming from the unprofessional, it would enlist confidence, and disarm hostility. When the "bride" says "come," many will respond to the call; and the waste places of empty pews will often be filled.

In the ever-ripening harvest fields of the earth, many reapers should every where go forth "bringing their sheaves with them." John, full of the love of Jesus, said "Behold the Lamb of God!" "And the two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus;" "And one of the two findeth his own brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus." "Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith unto him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law did write, Jesus of Nazareth. Come and see." Even the woman of Samaria, in the newness of her knowledge of Christ, could run with alacrity among her fellow citizens, crying, "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" And if the testimony of such a one led many of the Samaritans to believe on him, are there not trophies of grace to be won from the enemy, for Christ, by those who have long tasted that the Lord is gracious? Who will go abroad, in the fulness of their experience, and in the earnestness of their love, like David, saying, "Come, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul?"

2. Related to the foregoing topic, is a special field of duty for Christian workers,—*the Sunday School*. We may thank God that many laborers have gone into this vineyard; and, in its wholesome exercise, are gathering strength and wages and clusters of heavenly vintage. But still it may be said, "And he went out about the third hour, and found others standing idle in the market place." To these we may say, "Go ye also into the vineyard." The value of the Sunday School as a helper to family training, and for a general awakening of the

interest of the Church in the young; as a corrective of bad teaching in foolish and ungodly households; as a needful supplement to all other forms of instruction; as a means of grace resulting largely in the conversion of youth; as well as in its power of *self-education* in regard to teachers themselves, is not properly appreciated perhaps by many; and we are sure that multitudes of our laymen have a very inadequate sense of its importance. In neglecting this agency, they suffer a great duty to go by default; and are neglecting for themselves the food of those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

The large and liberal attention which is being given, especially in populous places, to Mission Sunday Schools, is full of promise, both for the special life and growth of the Church exercised thereby, and for the well-being of those "ready to perish for lack of knowledge." While these once sterile fields of labor are being opened for culture and are requiring a continually increasing number of laborers, there are richer soils lying fallow, and ready to grow up with thorns and briers. We mean the youth of our congregations, and in society around us, who are reaching or have past their majority, and who have deserted the Sunday Schools. There is no good reason, but the contrary, why these should not be retained there, in Bible classes. The success of the institution is imperfect without this result. To occupy this highest sphere of Sunday School duty, will demand the best talent of our Christian men. It is one that will do honor to themselves, cultivate their capacity for general usefulness to the Church and the world, and give the institution a power to which it is entitled in the progress of the Church toward the millennial age.

We cannot enlarge, as we would desire, on this subject, so full of urgency and utility; and may only thus briefly indicate our sense of its claims and advantages. A full discussion is indeed not so needful for it as for some others; being often enforced from the pulpit, and by the religious press; and also in associations and conventions of Sunday School teachers, now so frequently held; and from which we trust influences have gone forth, and from similar convocations may continue to issue, that will quicken the lay mind of all our churches into new, and more intelligent and holy activities for the success of this precious work.

3. Duties sometimes have their own era. There is a fitness of time which requires certain things. At the present day there is a necessity for our laymen *to be more denominational*. Not sectarian; but as having more of the *esprit du corps* of their own church organization. Speaking to this point, we believe that the religious world is about to witness the rapid decline of co-operative Christianity. Its receipts in money in its different organizations, its numerical force, and its visible efficiency, may not have been impaired so far by denominational movements, but increased by the advancing religious spirit of the age. Yet it is obvious that causes are at work, which will tend to its abatement and decay. The present century has seen the birth of great national societies, which rapidly culminated to a high degree of efficiency; and almost as rapidly are likely to pass away. They were the natural outgrowth of Christian union; and many still on the stage of life fondly hoped that they were God's way for making his Church *one*. But they now appear to have been only intended as a temporary measure—concentrating the scattered energies of the leading wise men of various sects for the adoption of holy schemes of well-doing; and for the pervasion, from influential centres, of the outlying masses of Christian mind with a nobler tone of Christian endeavor; and also to reach in the only way then practicable, large sections of country occupied by a heterogeneous population. They have accomplished much; but are likely to give way to the earnest, rigid and efficient denominationalism now rising up every where over our land. Some of us may live to be mourners at the obsequies of most of the national benevolent societies. They will probably find their sepulture, as they have had their cradle, within the present century. Perhaps the American Bible Society will keep its manhood unimpaired through the coming generations—the last relic of the modern form of co-operative Christianity.

Lamenting, as many of us do, this change in the programme of Christian effort, we must accept it as a destiny. Almost all large-hearted minds come to this conclusion reluctantly. They are reconciled to it by various considerations. One is the fitness of different denominations, for different classes of minds. Again, the most thorough, persistent and efficient work can only

be done through each man's elected Church. He does not get his motive power strong enough anywhere else. There is, also, a growing conviction that the oneness of the Church does not depend on an outward or visible unity in one, or in a very few denominations.

In the economy of society, it would not be wise to have one dry goods-store, and one grocery, and one bank, and so on; to supply, on the community system, the wants of the public; but that the whole should be thrown open to competition, in order to the best and largest supply, and the most liberal accommodation. So may God wisely intend that independent and somewhat rival religious organizations should supply gospel wants; and as competing merchants may live side by side, in amicable enterprise; so may the denominations, stimulated to the highest degree of religious activity, yet dwell together as brethren. In a word, let the Presbyterian become more and more a Presbyterian—and so through the inventory of Churches—each man cherishing his own pastor and local church, and giving his zeal and money and prayers for the enlargement and success of the educational and publication and missionary schemes of his own denomination.

We must, at least at present, accept the denominational action as the indication of God's method. And if they are wise, our laymen will adapt themselves to this make-up of religious providence. To this end let them cherish the historic life of their own people. And what a noble and stimulating record it is! Having its well-spring in the beautiful simplicity and purity of the primitive Church—its stream broken, indeed, and intermitted along the ages; breaking forth afresh in the days of the Reformation; its waters of life growing wider and deeper and stronger—a life current at which the nations of the earth may drink and be refreshed, wash and be made clean—well may her sons cherish with an honest gratulation her noble memories! Look at her grand historic features! Of men: Calvin, Knox, Hampden, Hamilton, Chalmers. Of people: Genevan and Huguenot, English and Scotch, Irish and American. Of "resistings unto blood:" Derry, Enniskillen, Boyne Water, Drumclog. Of principles: the love of knowledge, civil and religious liberty, and a pure Gospel; all permeating the

nations with a new social, educational, governmental and religious life. Of numbers: counted in all her church communions, by the million; and stretching over the continents and the isles of the sea!

But not alone this historic life should they cherish; but eminently, also, those forms of sound words,—doctrines set in order by the lights of theology—the creed of the Church, without which it would be as a rope of sand. Let every layman know intimately, as household words, what our Church believes, and be able to give a reason—and that best of all reasons, *proof texts*—for the faith that is in him. Every family should have its Confession of Faith: and there is no better place for it than, well-bound and in keeping with its companions, on the centre-table. We need not say that a thorough knowledge of the Shorter Catechism is needful for a sound Presbyterianism. An unwholesome neglect of this, we fear, obtains largely. Even after it has been learned in early youth, it is suffered, in a vast many instances, to fade out of the memory. It is, indeed, strong meat; but only the more needful, as the aliment, intellectual and moral, of the current reading, is of such factitious and doubtful mixture. The vast variety of side-dishes, dessert and pastries that constitute so much of the intellectual “bill of fare” of the times, makes it more expedient that this wholesome and nutritious dish should grace and bless the table! This terse, well-ordered, expressive, truthful and time-honored little manual should be a *vade-mecum* with the old and young of our whole denomination.

4. Another obligation of our laymen, of prime importance, is that of *Christian benevolence*. This is specially their duty. With few exceptions, the monied resources of the church are in their hands. They hold the key and keep the coffer. What each man should give should be determined by himself—but his giving should be according to his means—*conscientious, systematic, discriminating* and *generous*. Ten per cent. of their revenue has been assumed by a number as their standard; though there are many whose resources will enable them greatly to exceed this. Yet this rate would, if universal, meet all the demands, in all their forms, on God’s treasury. Through all the grades of pecuniary ability, from small to great, from po-

verty even to opulence, there is something, little or much, due to God's cause, which cannot safely be withheld; and the payment of which, we have divine testimony for saying, will bring its liberal reward. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet; but it tendeth to poverty." Christian benevolence should surpass other forms of liberality; and among religious men it should, at least, keep pace with the generosity of worldly men, of equal pecuniary means, in regard to the special objects of liberality among the latter. They should seek familiarity with, and interest themselves in, all the forms of religious benevolence—particularly those that relate to our own denomination. Everywhere in the Church it should be regarded as one of the tests of piety and a means of grace. Christian men should avail themselves also of the ready susceptibilities of their children for the nurture of this form of character; that the coming generation may not fail, however the present one may, to attain the needful standard of liberality.

Religious benevolence is one of the triple powers of Christianity. Liberal giving, diligent doing, and earnest praying, are the three great instrumentalities of the Church, which the Spirit of God will bless, to the pulling down of the strongholds of evil, and the upbuilding of that kingdom, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. We cannot withhold or dwarf this power of beneficence without dishonoring and disordering and thwarting the play of the other two forces. Perhaps the one thing that is wanting now, as much as any other, is a grateful, self-denying, intelligent, loving spirit of benevolence. It is needed for the revenue it will bring to meet all the increasing wants of Christian progress; but it is wanted also for its work on our own souls; relaxing our selfishness; teaching us that the sweetest and best and holiest use of money is in making gifts to God's cause; doing this out of a heart in sympathy with the mind of Christ—out of a heart that yearns over the good such gifts may do in a world made desolate by sin, and to souls crowding downward to death—out of a heart which trembles at the warnings of God against selfishness—out of a heart whose generous impulses are but the throbbings of a divine life from Him who has said, that with "such sacrifices he is well pleased."

What will it profit us, if superfluities load our tables; if furniture adorn our dwellings; if elegancies of dress deck our persons; if we lay up, in store, reserves for the future—what will it profit us if we have impoverished our souls by expenditures for comfort, or pleasure, or pride—and impoverished Christ in our withholdings? The self-denial by which we should have given—the holy love by which we should have given—the stimulus of sympathy by which we should have given—the sense of responsibility by which we should have given,—would have been means of grace worth more to us, in the true enjoyment of life, in a conscience void of offence towards God and man, and in the gladness unspeakable of a soul at harmony with righteousness and peace in the Holy Ghost, than any earthly good that perishes with the using.

5. We would further call the attention of our laymen *to the better support of the ministry*. In a small minority of our churches an adequate provision for this object is generously made. But in the large majority, the compensation is far below the average emoluments of educated and of business men; unworthy of their moral worth and services; and unworthy, too, of those to whom they minister.

This state of things is one cause of the decline in candidates for ministerial education. It is a generally conceded thing that a minister's life is merely a starveling business! And thus insensibly it is lowered in the esteem of Christian parents; and through them, in their children. It may be said that if there were a high standard of piety among Christian young men, they would, in the spirit of self-denial, throw themselves into the work of the ministry: But the stream will not rise higher than the fountain. If there be not in the body of Christians a self-denying and generous spirit, there will not be such in any class of it, and especially in our young men, who have all the world before them where to choose; so that it will not do to reproach them for a defect which is measurably the result of our own deficiency.

The law of compensation for ministerial service is one that would hardly seem necessary to require enforcement. Precluded as clergymen are from those worldly pursuits by which others seek emoluments and fortune; exercising a profession which would seem to bring them closely in contact with the ge-

nerous sympathies of the people; performing public duties of the highest value—one would think that the risks were that the “mammon of unrighteousness” would be in the excess rather than in the minimum. But we need not say how palpably otherwise it is. The cry comes up from all denominations that the ministry are not adequately sustained. Paul wrote some things “hard to be understood:” but his sayings in 1 Cor. 9: 7—14, are not in that category. Will our brethren turn to them and ponder them? There is a finish and beauty and fullness in the passage which makes it like “apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Rhetoric and logic in strength and beauty interlacing each other; and the whole enforced with a precept as pointed and urgent and obligatory as any in the decalogue: “Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.”

6. The Christian man has, *in his business*, a power which is either a detriment or a blessing, according to his use of it. If it be exercised by any palpable selfishness, cunning, greed, unscrupulousness, disregard of the rights and comforts of others, or worldly-mindedness in any of its forms, there will be a taint about his character, impairing his usefulness in all his religious undertakings. He may be tolerated in the machinery of the Church, out of the necessity for laborers; or in hopefulness that grace will outgrow or extirpate these noxious weeds of character; or sometimes from less worthy motives. But there is always a moral malaria about any one wearing the livery of Christ, whose dealings with his fellow-men are not strictly upright, truthful, impartial, generous, humane, courteous, manly! On the other hand, a Christian can and ought to show in all the walks of life, that while he is not “slothful in business,” he is also “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Reason and experience, as well as Scripture, teach us that it is not necessary to seek a cloister to escape temptation, and “to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.” If religion be objectively related to God, it is also so towards men; and the commandments, though written, accordingly, on two tables, were but *one* decalogue. A majority of them, too, lie in the common functions of life, as these are connected with our fellow-creatures. We are, moreover, so constituted that the industry re-

quisite for any lawful pursuit is as wholesome for the soul as it is for the body and mind. It is not hard to conceive of a Christian man, moving in all the enterprises and activities of his vocation; touching, at all points of contact, the enterprises and activities of irreligious men; and so deporting himself that no credible impeachment of any of the moralities of life, shall lie against him. Nor is it any further stretch of the conception, to suppose such an one, with all his diligence and thrift, letting his light so shine before men, that they may see his good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven. "Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

7. We may notice here briefly the important relations of the Christian man *in the family*. As a husband, father, master, brother or son, his position involves great responsibilities, largely affecting the religious weal of the domestic circle: and through that, it has world-wide issues. Christ has made the first of these relations the symbol of his union to "the bride, the Lamb's wife." The second is the emblem of God's headship, as "our Father who art in heaven." The next is guarded by a warning that we have a "Master in heaven." The fourth is shadowed forth in the comparison to Him that "sticketh closer than a brother." And the last is touchingly exhibited in the privileges "of adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father." No mind but the Infinite One which has given us these figures of speech, and almost countless precepts in his word, bearing on these obligations, can appreciate or express the ills which follow their default, or the blessings consequent on their fulfilment. To notice merely the influences that pertain to them would be beyond our present compass. We can only advert to the subject in this summary way, in order to stir up the brethren "by way of remembrance."

8. Any discussion of the duties appertaining to our male membership would be very incomplete without enjoining on them the obligation to *social and public prayer*. In many of our churches the power of laymen is only partially developed in this direction. There are many, whose piety and fitness for

this exercise are unquestionable, who are relying supinely on those brethren, who have more zeal, or courage, or sense of duty than they have in this matter. It is not a question of intellectual capacity; for often we find that the educated church members, and those who are ready of utterance in business affairs, ignore this duty; while others less apt of speech and mental qualifications perform it. Taking our churches at large, perhaps not one-half the male members meet this reasonable requirement. They would find their profit every way in it. It would contribute to the development of their religious knowledge; to a higher elevation of their Christian character; to an enlargement of their religious zeal; to a deeper interest in souls; to more peace in believing and joy in the Holy Ghost; to more confidence among the Church at large in their profession of piety. And then they would be partakers more than now, in the march, and the skirmishes, and victories of the church militant—not mere camp followers, but part of the sacramental host, which the “Captain of our salvation” is leading forth, conquering and to conquer.

9. A great many other topics might be discussed, but we can barely refer to them. One that would seem hardly needful to speak of is, a regular attendance at the church services, not merely on the Sabbath, but through the week. Looking at the thin audiences of men at the latter, one would think that the apostle was speaking a sad prophecy for all time when he said: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is!”

We may adduce, also, a delinquency towards “the stranger that is within thy gates,” in the matter of offering him a seat in the house of God. Almost all of our readers who have travelled, have had painful experience of this lack of church hospitality, especially in cities; making them feel how homeless they are among brethren—strangers in the “household of faith.” If our men, not lacking in civility elsewhere, could realize how unsympathizing and ungracious and uncivil this neglect is, they would, we should think, utterly eschew the default.

Many of our male members have, directly or indirectly, in their employ, a number of persons whose attendance at the

sanctuary they could easily secure; to whom, indeed, a courteous invitation and a proper effort to accommodate them, would be received as a compliment; thus establishing a cordiality which would be found mutually conducive to the pecuniary interests of both parties; realizing thus that this, as well as all forms of godliness, "is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

"Given to hospitality." Such is the curt and significant outline of a phase of character, given by the apostle, who had doubtless met, in his missionary wanderings, with some of the *genus homo* who give the "cold shoulder" to itinerant and visiting preachers; and thus he appreciated more keenly and described more vividly those who ministered to his wants, in his self-denying travels. We have plenty of lay-members who have well-furnished parlors, and comfortable beds, and abundant larders, to whom a prophet's chamber is a myth—unless it may be at an irruption of a synod or presbytery, and then they receive it as another "persecution of the saints." Our brethren will find it to their profit, in every respect, if they will cultivate this grace. "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink, or a stranger and took thee in?" "And the King shall answer, Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

We would bespeak from our brethren a deeper interest in the missionary enterprises of the day. All the details, especially of those connected with our own Church, should command their attention. While our hearts have been perplexed and saddened, and sometimes alarmed, at the recent aspects of home missions among our people; yet we have an abiding conviction that the ample and earnest discussion of the subject, which has occurred during the last few years, has done much to stir up the thoughts of our laymen to its nature, difficulties, requirements and prospects: so that we look confidently that, in the early future, we shall behold a great advance over even our most favored past history, in all that constitutes success. Our present relation to the foreign field, through our old and accredited and noble agency, is such as may well elicit, as it demands, our intelligent and hearty co-operation. Let this

matter, in both its aspects, foreign and domestic, secure at the family altar, and in the missionary concert, the prayers of our male membership, as well as their liberal gifts. And thrice blessed are those Christian households, out of which go sons and daughters to build up the desolations of our land, or to carry the unsearchable riches of Christ to the heathen.

10. This Article is not designed especially to attract the attention of our church officers; being intended to contribute something to arouse the Christian brotherhood of our people at large. Yet all that we have said has indeed more pertinency to them than to the body of our lay brethren. Without entering into any discussion of the Scripture basis of the ruling eldership, we may say that their position as office-bearers gives them advantages and involves responsibilities beyond others. Having been chosen by the Church to preserve its order and nurture its life, they have a sanction growing out of the confidence thereby manifested and invested in them, which justifies and requires their special attention to every Christian duty, that is in any wise incumbent on others.

We may notice here a common delinquency in the matter of *representations of the Sessions* in the church courts. This admirable and useful feature in our church polity is greatly damaged by neglect in this particular. Presbyterial and synodical records, almost everywhere, show a delinquency in this matter quite marvellous and censurable. It would be an eminently healthy sign, in our Church, if this default were largely corrected. We would that our brethren in the eldership would make a special note of this. We speak frankly to them, in this matter, and some others following; being of their number and "in the same condemnation." Our absence from the ecclesiastical courts is a stigma; it is also a mischief to ourselves; and is a wrong done to the churches we should represent. To the extent of the delinquency it unpresbyterianizes those assemblies.

Need we say that there is also a great default in the members of our Church Sessions, in regard to that *watch* and *care* over the flock, which will prevent wanderings, delinquencies and backslidings among the membership. Representing, as each eldership is presumed to represent, the highest style of piety in its particular church, called unsought by its communi-

cants to their office bearing, and charged by God as overseers of the flock, they are in no sense arrogating powers, but meeting responsibilities, not to be evaded or transferred, while they pay this needful attention to the church.

And in the exercise of *discipline*—sadly needful almost everywhere—how little is done by our elders! The membership is often allowed to neglect, continuously, palpable duties; to engage in practices of a doubtful, inconsistent, and ultimately dangerous character; and sometimes to practise immoralities; without notice, warning, rebuke, or accountability. As we look over our churches, how many “branches” are not merely unfruitful, but visibly in the various states of blight, disease, decay and rottenness! A diligence, far below the true standard of official duty, ought to prevent or remedy these sad impairments of the beauty and fruitfulness of the Church. What may we suppose would be the dealing of our blessed Saviour, if he were again in the earth walking among the vines of Zion? “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

There is still a higher and holier and happier duty pertaining to these office-bearers. It is that they “*feed the Church of God* which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Not that they have the prerogative of public teaching and preaching. Yet there may be an informal exercise in public of the “gift of speech,” that by proper culture, and on suitable occasions, may be used to great advantage. The common sense things of piety, said by common sense men, have often a directness and influence on incidental occasions, which mere theological and official speech may fail to accomplish. There ought to be more use made of this privilege of talk. We are sure it is not going to be abused; and therefore may exhort the brethren with the more urgency to “speak often one to another.”

There is a large measure of usefulness in this gift open to our elders in *religious visitings* through the congregation. They should aim at a thorough knowledge of the individual religious character of the people; and at a cultivation of their own powers, by reading, reflection and prayer for this object. In no other way can they learn fully the condition and wants of their

church. At the same time all their own gifts of piety will be enhanced; and the religious well-being of the entire body be cultivated. Will not brethren be encouraged by the specific and glorious promise made to the fulfilment of this duty? "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

The office of a *Sunday School teacher* falls in this prerogative of the eldership. To a large extent, we believe they exercise it. Yet, looking over our churches, are there not many well qualified by education, experience, talent, and piety who are neglecting it—many of them making the excuse of week-day toils and advancing years; and devolving on the young and inexperienced, duties which they themselves are better fitted to perform? "Brethren, these things ought not so to be."

There are many other considerations pertaining to this part of our subject—but we cannot, for want of space, treat of them. We would refer this class of our readers to the tract issued by our Publication Committee, entitled "The Office of Ruling Elders," for a full and earnest and admirable discussion of the subject. It would be money well spent, if some one would see to it that this brief treatise were put into the hands of all our eldership.

We expressed, in the opening of this Article, the desire that some bold and brave and earnest spirit would present to the churches these duties and delinquencies. Yet this is a vain wish. But all that is practicable in the matter might be done by our several pastors, if they would but thoughtfully and diligently and affectionately and earnestly undertake it. Who like them, for instance, could evoke the *social life* of a church? And so through most of the inventory of lay duties. In some of our churches we find noble examples of this pastoral utility. But in how many is it wanting! Would that these honored servants of God could see their duty and privilege in this great necessity. They would find its results every way to their own advantage; and in regard to Zion, it would be said of her, "Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily. Thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rear-ward."

Finally, By the wants of those perishing for lack of knowledge in heathen lands—by the countless waste places of our own country—by the ignorance and irreligion which lie around our homesteads—by an inefficient church-membership everywhere needing to be brought up to a higher tone of life and character—by the yearnings of our ministry for the counsel and co-operation of their laymen—by the damage done to their own souls in neglected duty—by the holy joys of diligent obedience—by the love of Christ constraining them—by the plaudit, “well done good and faithful servant”—by that shining which shall be “as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever”—we would plead with our male membership that in all the duties of toiling and giving and praying for the kingdom of Christ, they “quit themselves like MEN!”

